

Alexandria has an opportunity to enliven the waterfront from south of Daingerfield Island to Jones Point and west to Lee Street as a diversified, mixed used area along the Potomac that offers a collection of multi-use, widely-diverse active and passive spaces – different destinations – united by Public Art. With careful planning, a variety of uses can coexist and Alexandria needs only to look to Chicago for an example of how a waterfront can have a natural appearance and to Cape Town for an example of how to incorporate a working waterfront.

The waterfront builds on the vibrant artistic environment that includes and radiates from the Torpedo Factory Arts Center, a world-renown example of adaptive reuse that transformed the center of the Alexandria waterfront some three decades ago and reestablished the waterfront as Alexandria's most important public asset. Gone at last are such commercial activities as Norton Rendering Plant, Bogle Arsenic Plant, the coal depot in what is now Waterfront Park or Atlantic Richfield test firing rockets from Oronoco Bay. In exchange for giving up plans to build three residential towers, the City traded the surplus Fickling School site to Watergate and developed Founders Park. When the CEO of Texaco, a United Way Board member, announced plans to donate Texaco's tank farm at Oronoco Bay to the United Way, the City asked for a part of the property donation and created Oronoco Bay Park. When Virginia Concrete no longer needed to operate barge traffic, the City exchanged this waterfront property to create Waterfront Park. Creative efforts such as these achieved a great deal with minimal cost. They should provide inspiration to today's efforts.

The waterfront and the Public Art it contains should reflect the exceptional history of this City. History is Alexandria's most important and most enduring heritage and what the City shows waterfront visitors and ultimately passes on should surpass what current Alexandrians have inherited. Alexandria has housed many of the revolutionaries, rebels and rock and rollers who have shaped this nation and its culture. One cannot walk Alexandria streets without encountering this country's past and the waterfront – where it all began - should celebrate that history and Alexandria's place in it.

At the same time, while Alexandria treasures its past, it is very much a modern city and as a modern city it is an important gateway for new arrivals to this country. Today, over one in four Alexandrians was born in another country and these new residents have brought to share with the City their arts, culture and vitality. These gifts contribute to a vibrant, creative community filled with international festivals, crafts, and food; and the waterfront should reflect that vibrancy and creativity just as it reflects this country's history. In addition, the waterfront should offer glimpses of the future. Since the arrival of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Offices, Alexandria has become the "intellectual capital of the world." There will never be anything new on the face of the earth or in the skies above it that doesn't come through Alexandria. The waterfront should remind visitors and residents that, as a result, Alexandria cradles the future of this planet. Talk about an Eco-City!

Everything on the waterfront from the smallest square of open space to the densest building should epitomize the highest design standards that can be envisioned. Artists must be involved in every decision because every decision reflects on design. Public Art in all forms must be used to enliven and punctuate the waterfront, leading to a unique fusion of arts, history and progress. And while the highest standards should be applied, even in Old Town a tiny dash of funk can add a bit of character.

The waterfront must truly be mixed use with no single use predominating. A vibrant waterfront needs layers of activity, not just residential/commercial/retail. It needs places that

reflect the daily life of Alexandria and that are diverse, active/passive, built-up/open space, natural/developed, spaces for performances and high-energy gatherings or quiet uses. In places, there should be a working waterfront reminiscent of past wharves and docks. Residents and visitors need places to sit quietly as the water flows by and reflect on a natural landscape without being aware that anyone else is there. At other times, they need places where they can sit and watch people.

And those people should be walking, alone or arm-in-arm, with or without dogs, rollerblading, riding bikes, pushing baby carriages or wheelchairs and jogging on walkways that are designed to allow these many functions to coexist safely in close proximity. As crucial to walkway design as its form and functions is its appearance. Here is a typical example of an opportunity for Public Art: the use of mosaics or other finishes to tell the story of Alexandria and its original environment in prose and verse or in pictures. Landscaping can reinforce this with labeled plantings that replicate the area's original plants. Every surface from fencing to benches to hatch covers to docks to paving and landscaping should meet the standards for carefully selected design elements and provide continuity in this large, diverse area. As diverse as the component parts of the waterfront may be, Public Art can provide the connectivity that unites the waterfront so that it feels whole and complete and related as an integral part to the City it spawned.

The waterfront will never be "finished" but when the next phase of its evolution slows down, residents and visitors should know that the Potomac River is at the head of King Street, not at its foot. That is how Alexandria started and the waterfront and water itself should be accorded enough importance to make that clear again. Visitors and residents should have a 24/7 opportunity to be by the water, on the water, and, maybe even despite the legal challenges, built out over the water. And when they can't reach in and touch the river, they should have places where they can sit on the edge of a fountain or basin or pool and put their hands or feet into water.

People from all over the City and the Region should be pulled to the water with open-air markets by day and art performances and activities by day and night. There can be indoor and outdoor spaces for markets, concerts, poetry readings, dance performances, theatre, films, art exhibitions, classes and other community-driven activities. Where noise and weather are factors, spaces can be indoors. Where they would not be deterrents, they can be outdoors. There can be boxcars and barges for some activities or just a painted wall with a smooth finish so films can be shown against it or changing arrays of façade designs projected on to it. Art installations can be permanent or temporary.

The creation of a "Waterfront Czar" staff can facilitate programming such activities, assuring that they are sanctioned and take place at appropriate locations along the waterfront. This staff can provide the on-going innovative management and programming a successful, vibrant public space needs and serve as a one-stop office for scheduling and overseeing activities and events, handling internal coordination among City staff and policing waterfront activities. The ease with which artists and others can schedule activities will increase the number of events which occur and assure that they are appropriate and approved.

It is possible to fit housing into the waterfront and to balance the need to provide public access with the residents' right to privacy. Access to and from the waterfront must be easy and must run both ways including public transportation to other parts of Alexandria. Easy access should be via engaging, easily boarded public transit that is convenient and fun to ride.

The waterfront must be freed from the bullying dominance of privately-owned vehicles. The waters-edge parking lots they spawn should be replaced by open space, recreation areas, or other sites for dining, strolling, and enjoying the waterfront experience. Traffic must be put in its place so that it doesn't interfere with the continuity of the waterfront or with the safe, comfortable enjoyment of it and the activities it offers.

Easy access also includes information about everything Alexandria offers and how to reach it. A visitors' center annex (possibly including performance space) could be provided on the waterfront and any number of free-standing kiosks added at various sites to provide City-wide information, especially about arts and cultural activities. Public transportation needs to come right to the waterfront to connect it to the entire City. It is vital to disperse visitors throughout the City so that they don't overwhelm the waterfront while other areas starve for visitors.

The waterfront should reach out into the City (preferably not by flooding). There should be visceral connections to the waterfront. As visitors and residents move parallel to the water, they should see tantalizing glimpses of river that lure them toward the water. For example, despite railroad tracks and unfortunate Robinson Terminal buildings, one of the City's most stirring sights is Pendleton Street as it sweeps into the curve of North Union by Oronoco Bay. Even as one loses sight of the river thereafter, one regains its majesty at Founders Park.

There should be a place for fishing and boating, feeding the ducks, and temporarily docking. The waterfront needs ferries and water taxis, lights and lighthouses, boathouses (especially with community rooms above), and a museum, especially to present Alexandria's history and establish its connection to the water. There need to be places to buy bait and tackle and catch and clean fish. (If there are no fish to be caught, the City should work with surrounding jurisdictions so that someday there are.) No matter how visitors arrive or how long they stay, they should have accommodation and services on the waterfront: shopping, dining and supplies for boaters and their boats. And all of these facilities should be designed attractively with color, humor, and all the other vitality Public Art can endow.

Signage is crucial and the most successful examples of good signs involved artists in the design process. The waterfront should tell Alexandria's story not only through the inherent design of the waterfront sections themselves but especially through interpretive signs. It's not possible to over interpret because people can always skip reading but those who want to know what something is or what it was or its history, not to mention the name of this tree or plant, should have that information readily available.

Whatever the City does, it should learn from the past and create a waterfront that is sustainable. About 120 years ago, Alexandria's once prosperous waterfront was almost derelict. As the City makes choices, it should be careful to create such a diverse waterfront that it can grow and evolve as future tastes and functions change.

It is not a waterfront plan that is needed but a waterfront vision and Public Art can guide, contribute to, enliven, and make real that vision for all Alexandrians.

Thank you to those foresighted, dedicated Alexandrians who went before us and had the vision to create today's waterfront. They have given us an invaluable head start on creating a world-class waterfront.

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